

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR"

# ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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## A STERN CHASE.

A STORY IN THREE PARTS.

By MRS. CASHEL HOEY.

### THE THIRD PART.

#### CHAPTER IX. FOUND OUT.

IF Henry Rodney, at the date of his meeting with the daughter of Fair Ines, had seated himself upon Prince Hassan's carpet, and had been forthwith deposited in Santiago de Cuba, to refresh his memory after twenty years, he would have found less change in Don Norberto de Rodas than in any other individual of his former acquaintance there. Don Norberto at twenty-five had looked ten years older, but at forty-five he seemed to be standing still in life. His hair was still densely black, and he was as lean and light of movement as of old, with the same furtive restlessness in his black eyes.

In his moral nature there was as little alteration. His life was as vicious, and his heart was as evil, as in the days when his cousin had crossed his path to her own ruin; his ambition and his covetousness were also unsatisfied now as then.

Don Saturnino de Rodas had died three years after the making of that will, concerning which Norberto had foreboded evil, and his prevision had been realised. The distrust, gradually growing into dislike, with which Don Saturnino had come to regard his nephew, would probably have been more plainly manifested if he had lived longer and seen more of Norberto. But, for a year before his death, Don Saturnino resided at La Valladolid, not coming to his house in Santiago at all, and he had no fault to find with his nephew in his business capacity.

The relations between Norberto and Doña Mercedes had been considerably

strained from the time when he had expressed his annoyance at her failure to ascertain the provisions of Don Saturnino's will, with so much candour and so little caution. Her pride, not to be subdued by her complicity with his wickedness, then received a wound which she never forgave.

He had to wait three years, and then to learn that his forebodings had fallen short of the truth. His uncle had done less for him than he had calculated as the very least he could do, in common decency—an elastic term when we apply it to other people's duty—and he had made mention of his lost daughter.

That Doña Mercedes was really ignorant of either of these injuries, which he ranked as equal, so unslaked was his hatred by time and death, Norberto refused to believe. He was convinced that the mention of Ines by her father was in reality prompted by Doña Mercedes, and that she had played him false, as he called it, from some superstitious motive. He had observed symptoms of this kind of weakness in her more than once, especially when anything occurred to make her uneasy about Ramon. Don Saturnino's reference to his daughter was to the effect that he had never been fully satisfied of her death, and, in the event of her return to her former home, or making appeal to Doña Mercedes or her brother, he charged them to receive her, or to reply to her, treating her in all respects as though she had not forfeited her place or her claims. The portion to which she was entitled by inheritance from her mother, and which had remained in his hands, would, of course, be hers. He added that these injunctions were also to hold good in the case of any child or children of his daughter, whose identity should be duly established.

Ten years had elapsed since the flight of

Ines de Rodas when those forgiving words saw the light, and three since her death. Norberto had the proofs of that event in his possession; but he kept his knowledge to himself as closely as ever, and merely observed to Don José de Silva that the injunctions were not of a practical nature; that Don Saturnino's entertaining the idea of his daughter's possible reappearance might be made to bear the interpretation of insanity, were it anybody's interest so to stigmatise it; and that there would be a fine chance for the rogues who make a profession of personation, in the loose and sentimental testamentary dispositions of his uncle. He might have seen that Doña Mercedes was painfully impressed, but his fixed idea of her falseness to him in the matter on which he was morally insane, blinded him.

To Don Norberto his uncle bequeathed a sum equivalent to the half of that which would have been the dowry of Ines, had she become the wife of her cousin. And then came the crowning proof of Don Saturnino's confidence in Doña Mercedes. Convinced that he could best assure the future welfare and happiness of his son by placing them unreservedly in the charge of the boy's mother, he bequeathed to her the whole remainder of his property, to be at her absolute disposition.

Norberto's rage at finding himself treated by his uncle so much worse than he had feared, was at once intensified and controlled as to its outward manifestations by this final blow, this last revelation of the "uxorious imbecility" of Don Saturnino. True Doña Mercedes had been, to a certain extent, Norberto's accomplice in the past; but not in a way that gave him any hold over her, to compare with the enormous advantage she possessed in wealth, power, and independence. All things, save one, had prospered with the house of De Rodas, for many years past, and the handsome, reserved, stately widow of its late head was a very rich woman. She was a clever woman also, one whom it would be difficult for him, whom she had every reason to regard with mistrust, to deceive; and there was nothing to bind her to prolong his association with her affairs, if it were not her good pleasure to do so. With his usual tact he accepted the situation, abandoning any notions of domineering which he had entertained while his uncle's will was yet a secret, and falling into his place of trusted subordinate with readiness that imposed on Doña Mercedes.

She had seen but little of Norberto for a long time, and in addition to her sincere grief for her generous and devoted husband, there was a trouble in her life, which dwarfed other things and put them at a distance. The Doña Mercedes who set at ease the dark mind of the man who had garnered up out of all the past only a store of hatred for the living and the dead who had befriended him, treating their interests as one, and his management of affairs as a matter of course, was more altered in mind than in person from the Doña Mercedes who had hated her husband's daughter, and had sanctioned the suppression of the desolate young widow's appeal to her father.

Of the manner of the rejection of that appeal, Doña Mercedes was innocent; of the ferocious threat which had driven Ines into the power of Willesden, through her desperate fear for her child, and the urgent necessity for hiding herself and the infant under another name and a changed condition, she was as ignorant as of the results which it produced. The girl had defied and deceived her; let her suffer for it! She had disgraced her family for the sake of a stranger. That he was dead was a fitting punishment for her, but no palliation of her offence to them. Let the family of the stranger see to her now! If they did not take proper care of her, Ines would make her moan again, no doubt; and then Doña Mercedes might think about her case. Until then, her father's weakness, already much to blame, should not be practised on.

Thus had Doña Mercedes made herself the accomplice of Norberto, and, as time went on and the silence was unbroken, she had readily accepted his view that Ines was dead. What other explanation was to be offered?

When Don Norberto's apprehensions as to his own future position were allayed by the prompt tact of Doña Mercedes, he had leisure of mind to exult in the secret knowledge which he possessed, and which, he soon began to suspect, would have been very precious to her. He would have been glad had that knowledge been of a different kind; he was forced to conclude that the child who had found a home with Hugh Rosslyn's sister was well cared for, and he would have liked to think of her as an outcast and a beggar; still, it was pleasant to watch the workings of Doña Mercedes's mind, now that she would give anything to be able to carry out her

husband's wishes, and to feel that he could quiet them if he would.

After the death of Don Saturnino, the big house in Santiago remained practically shut up, a few rooms being retained by Don Roberto for business purposes and his own use; but Doña Mercedes and her son residing at La Valladolid. In the third year of her widowhood Doña Mercedes took her son to Spain, and they were absent for several months. Before that time, however, odd things had been said about the boy, and the extraordinary seclusion in which his mother was bringing him up. It was only vague talk, but Doña Mercedes was a person of importance while Don Saturnino was not forgotten, and people did wonder why Ramon was so little heard of, and never seen in the city. Occasionally there was a revival of curiosity about the girl, the child of Don Saturnino's first wife, who had gone into a convent in a queer sort of way. Attempts were occasionally made by ladies of the more dauntless sort to extract information about Doña Mercedes and her son from Don Norberto; but he was politely impenetrable. Doña Mercedes, whom numbers of the actually existing society had known as one of the leaders of it, was said to be so plunged in devotion that there was little to choose between her house and the cloister. She heard none of the fitful speculations upon herself and her son; she kept the even tenour of her way, with the idol of her heart, and the sin which had "found her out", for all her company.

Year had followed year in a monotonous course. Norberto de Rodas was, as Captain Wharton had guessed him to be, a local magnate. His capacity as a man of business was rated very high, but otherwise he was of evil repute, and as unpopular as in the long-ago time when Rodney and Hugh Rosslyn "talked of the wolf, and they saw his ears". He was no favourite even with those who shared his vices, and profited by them, and he was still the favourite aversion of Don Pepito Vinent.

Doña Mercedes was a white-haired lady, in whose face might be read the constant schooling of sorrow. It was still pride that looked out of those strange blue eyes, but a softened pride, and the lines which patience had graven about the mouth tempered its imperiousness.

Her son at twenty-five years old resembles his mother, having the same clear, high-bred look, the same strange

blue eyes. But Ramon is still a child, and he will always be a child. This is the explanation of Doña Mercedes's secluded life—this is the constant sorrow that has softened the pride in her eyes, and trained her in the school of patience.

There had been nothing wrong with the boy until a year before his father's death, when he had a very bad fever, from which his body recovered completely, his mind not at all. Don Saturnino died without having learned the truth; he fancied his son's condition was only a protracted convalescence, and was latterly too lethargic to think about it. Upon his mother the knowledge had come with unerring and unsparing certainty, and afterwards, with the hearing of the paragraph in Don Saturnino's will relating to Ines, had come the recollection of what she herself had done, and the conviction that judgment was upon her.

Norberto had discerned correctly enough the strain of what he called superstition in Doña Mercedes. It was, in truth, the striving of conscience and an early-implanted, but unfruitful faith, in a soul to which piety was unknown. When this strife was first kindled, the boy was but fifteen; the dreadful change, the arrest, or rather the retrogression of intelligence was of recent occurrence; there surely was—there must be hope. Might there also be some sort of possible propitiation? Was there a place of repentance for her? Then it was that she betrayed the direction of her thoughts to Norberto, to his unmeasurable contempt, and that he steadily withheld from her the fact of the existence of Ines's child.

Ten years! The silence of death maintained for ten years! That could only mean death. She must bear in mind that at the time the fullest enquiry was made, without result, to satisfy Don Saturnino; it was impossible that anything could come of a renewed enquiry now. How were they to set about it? Thus did Norberto meet her timidly-hinted wishes and her unconsciously-revealed remorse. Then, too, he had referred to his own part in the catastrophe with a half-careless regret, treating it lightly as a young man's exaggeration of a fair-enough feeling, but conveying in words, tone, and manner, that for him the whole thing was dead and gone to the very verge of that dead-and-goneness which becomes boredom beyond bearing.

Time passed for the boy who had become



a man, but remained a child; his mother lived for him only, while Don Norberto ruled over the affairs of the house of De Rodas, and the name of Ines was never uttered by either of the two who had driven her to her doom.

There was little change in the course of Doña Mercedes's life for several years, and the changing world around her interested and occupied her not at all. But, in the same year that, in England, witnessed the events just narrated, the "thing which she had feared" befell her—Don Ramon de Rodas died. Her grief was beyond telling; and not the least part of it was the knowledge that there were people who said it was a happy release, a great blessing, and all the other things that people do say about afflictions outside their personal experience, and which they regard from their comfortable standpoint of no-feeling.

Don Norberto behaved very well on this occasion, which promoted him to the position of an heir-presumptive. He had probably never approached so nearly to contentment as when, after the funeral of Doña Mercedes's son, he betook himself to a contemplation of his own position and prospects. The former was very good, and, above all, it was safe; the latter were brilliant. There did not exist anybody, so far as Doña Mercedes knew, who could be, upon any reasonable grounds whatever, interposed between himself and the ultimate possession of the whole of his late uncle's wealth. That he was only a few years younger than Doña Mercedes was a consideration which did not trouble him, or disturb his calculations.

Don Ramon had died at Santiago, and his mother remained at her town house, but in complete seclusion. Don Norberto naturally indulged in some conjectures respecting what she would be likely to do with the remainder of her life. Its sole occupation for so many years had been her son, that Don Norberto was at a loss to imagine in what direction she would seek employment for her time. She had renounced society, and society had forgotten her. For a short time he had thought it likely she might have gone back to Spain, after Don Saturnino's death, to reside among her own people, leaving him master of the position at Santiago, and he had ardently desired that solution. The affliction that both overshadowed and filled her life was, however, even then too plain to be mistaken, and it deprived her of all

care for anything outside itself. She had no wish to see her native country again. None of her kin whom she had ever known were living now. There was no competing interest to trouble Don Norberto's security. He was aware that in one sense he was nothing to Doña Mercedes, but in another—the only sense he cared about—he was all she had.

While he was reflecting upon these things in a mood as nearly pleasant as he was capable of, a happy idea occurred to Don Norberto. Supposing Doña Mercedes were to take to religion! Propitious fate could only do him one better turn than this.

He welcomed the notion with warmth; indeed he caressed it so fondly as to lose the sense of its incompatibility with all previous indications of character in Doña Mercedes, and to arrive, after a short time, at regarding it as the likeliest thing in the world.

The solitary respect in which the life of Doña Mercedes de Rodas now resembled that of twenty golden years ago, was her invariable attendance at early mass at the cathedral. Every morning she might be seen, wearing deep mourning attire, and with her silver-white hair, covered by a long, black veil, kneeling in the chapel of San Ignacio, on the same spot where fair Ines had knelt at her side, in the beauty of her bright girlhood. She was usually the first to take her place in the chapel, and the last to leave it. Was the happy thought of Don Norberto near the mark? Was fate going to do him that supremely good turn—was Doña Mercedes taking to religion—taking to it, that is, in the serious way which would lead to her retiring to a convent?

It was not surprising that Don Norberto should regard these questions in a cheerfully affirmative light, when on a certain day, having asked to see Doña Mercedes on business, he was told she had gone to the Convent of Las Anonciades.

No disturbing idea was suggested to him by this. It was with light-hearted expectation of the happiest results from the visit that he went to his interview with Doña Mercedes in the evening.

He found her in the inner corridor—that which overlooked the patio, where the fountain played as of old, and the flowering-plants made a central spot of colour. A few lights were twinkling in the offices, but the balcony was dim.



Doña Mercedes was seated in the shade, and her face was not distinctly to be seen, but there was nothing calculated to disturb the serenity of Don Norberto in her manner of receiving him, and listening to his business communication. Her demeanour was now habitually grave, and her voice was always low. When he had said what he had come to say, and the matter was disposed of her composure was slightly shaken as she asked him to remain with her, in order that she might speak to him on a matter of grave import to them both. In the dim light he shot an eager glance at her, and his hopes rose high.

Doña Mercedes lifted her black fan, and shaded her face. Why did that movement send Norberto's memory travelling twenty years back, and show him Ines in the day of her scorn and his defeat? So vividly did the image of the girl, as she had defied him, rise up before him, that the years seemed as nothing, and the old hatred and revenge, fulfilled yet baffled, swelled his heart anew.

"I have reopened a sealed book to-day," said Doña Mercedes, "and read strange things in it. Do you know where I have been?"

"At the Convent of Las Anunciadas, I believe."

"For the first time for many years. I will tell you, Norberto, what made me go there. It was remorse."

"Remorse!"

"Yes. Since my son was taken from me I have been learning that my sin had found me out, and with the knowledge came despair, because I could see no place for repentance; because no reparation, however late, was possible; and I must bear the curse, together with the punishment, to the end."

"What do you mean? What folly is this?"

"You know well what I mean, Norberto; and I am not speaking foolishly."

She let her fan fall to the ground, and faced him now, with her hands tightly clasped, and her features set in resolute self-control.

"I will not reproach you—do not fear that. My own share in the wrong that was done to my husband's child is too great, too heinous, to give me the right to reproach you, even knowing what I now know."

"What do you know?"

For all the hardihood of his tone there was fear in it.

"That Ines had a child, that she appealed to her father in the name of her child, and that you suppressed the appeal. Do not deny this, Norberto; but, for Heaven's sake, tell me the truth. Now, after all these years, tell me what you really did know; let this awful thing be cleared up between us."

He gripped the sides of his chair, and ground his teeth as though he were striving to suppress the manifestation of bodily pain. The same kind of convulsion that had seized him when Doña Mercedes told him that Ines had fled passed over him now, and although she could hardly see his face, she divined the passion that distorted it.

"Who told you?"

"The English nun, Sister Santa Gertrudis, who was Ines's friend, has long been at the head of the community, and when I asked to see the reverend mother I recognised her. It is not necessary for me to repeat to you the reminiscences, the questions, and the answers, which led to her discovery that I had never known of the existence of the child. I did not try to excuse myself for the part which I had taken in the separation of Ines from her father, and the venerable nun, who had never forgotten her, did not hesitate to condemn me as I deserved. But when she asked what had become of the child, she saw that I was innocent and ignorant of wrong in respect to her—for Ines's child was a girl—and she knew that the guilt of her abandonment must lie at the door of the person who acted for us in everything. I need not repeat her words; they sank deeply into my heart. I entreat you to tell me the truth. We may both find peace and pardon yet in undoing what has been done."

Her voice failed her here, and tears rolled down her pale and wrinkled cheeks.

Don Norberto neither spoke nor moved.

"I entreat you," she repeated, "to tell me all the truth. I will not blame you for anything which you did or left undone. What right should I have to blame you? We were accomplices, and you went beyond me—that is the only way to look at it now. I cannot undo my sin, and the punishment of it can never be remitted in this world; but there is something that may be done, if you will but tell me all, and help me."

"Now, if I were but sure how much or how little the old woman in the convent knows," thought Don Norberto, "I might beat them both yet." But he said only:

"You could have had the truth at any time by asking for it. It was your policy from the first to say nothing, to ask nothing, to know nothing. I followed your lead. You hated the false wretch who brought disgrace upon our name as much as I did, though not with such good reason, and it was your line to know as little as possible about what had become of her, while it was mine to know as much."

"I grant all that," she said feebly, "but it is vain to speak of it. Every feeling of mine, except the one wish to make what atonement may be mercifully permitted to me, lies buried with my son."

"You do not doubt, I presume, that the woman is dead?"

"Oh no, I do not doubt that. But the child?"

"I cannot tell you whether she is living or dead, because I do not know. If you were wise you would abstain from enquiring. I don't profess to understand your present frame of mind, or how you account for its extraordinary contradiction of your consenting silence for all these years. Nor shall I waste breath in the attempt to justify my own conduct. It suited your purpose in the past; it suits your purpose no longer. So be it. You shall hear all that I can tell you."

"And you think she is living, and safe with her father's sister?"

"I see no reason to doubt it, and the fact is easy to be ascertained."

"She has not suffered as her mother suffered?"

"Not at all. I fancy she has been well cared for."

"I will write by the next mail," said Doña Mercedes, "and send my letter through the agent whose address you have. Notwithstanding all time's changes, there will be someone responsible for its reaching the right hands. I thank you, Norberto. This has been a painful interview, but I have well deserved all that it has made me suffer. Let us bury the past now."

Lights had been brought in, and he could see her face, as she rose and stood for a few moments, with a forlorn, lost look in her faded eyes. Then she bade him good-night, and left him, confounded no less by what had occurred, than by the quietness with which this scene of startling import had passed. His own concentrated rage was beyond relief by words. At first it was all the blind wrath of defeat and dis-

appointment, but that phase was soon succeeded by another.

On the following day, Doña Mercedes de Rodas addressed to Miss Merivale, under cover to Mr. Walter Ritchie, a communication whose first effect was to cause Rodney to abandon his intention of going out to Cuba.

### MODERN TASTE.

THE Georgian period was the dark age of taste in England. Art of all kinds was then at its lowest ebb. As nearly as might be England had "reeled into the beast." Manners, music, painting, architecture, dress, furniture, were all unlovely. The mind of a generation that had tolerated habitual drunkenness at home, and for amusement watched prize-fights and cock-fights, expressed itself outwardly in the most cumbersome and unmeaning style of dress, architecture, and furniture that the world has yet seen.

About the beginning of the present generation, that is to say about thirty or forty years ago, a change became evident. People began to have a dim idea that the taste of their fathers was not all it might have been. They began to rebel against such things as the decoration of carpets and chairs with flowers; they felt there was something unpleasant in trampling over or sitting on blossoms; but it was rather a feeling that something was wrong than a knowledge of what was right. The parents had eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth being consequently on edge, their first efforts were not happy. They invented mauve and magenta for their persons, and ribbon-gardening for their pleasure grounds, and honestly admired them all. In those early days of revival we were almost more barbarous in our tastes than our fathers and grandfathers had been. By degrees, however, taste improved, and, when the present generation began to grow up and settle itself, it was able to some extent to avoid the barbarous if it did not quite know what was right. The "advanced" people struck out a line for themselves in the right direction; but, unfortunately, those who wished to be considered as belonging to the new school followed them blindly and caricatured their ideas. The new taste said our mothers' rooms had been too bright and garish; and, before long, rooms were nearly black. It said that china was a beautiful manufacture that ought not to be hidden away in cup-

boards; and immediately every drawing-room in London broke out into an irruption of china. It was hung on walls, and even on doors, in every possible and impossible place, till a lady's drawing room looked as if it had been arranged for pistol practice. Half the world went mad about china. Enormous prices were given for it, and you might hear people disputing whether a more than ordinarily ugly and ill-made figure was "Old Chelsea," and worth several guineas, or "Fair ware," i.e., the common pottery sold at country fairs, and not worth twopence. About its artistic value, its power of gratifying the eye, there was no question whatever. It was represented by a minus quantity; but that did not enter into the question.

Then came the Chippendale mania. If you would be considered as a person of taste, you must worship Chippendale furniture. No room was tolerable unless it was furnished with Chippendale. The ugliest piece of furniture that could be said to be Chippendale was more admired than the most beautiful and graceful thing in any other style. If it was not Chippendale it had no merit, though its lines might be perfect.

This craze was subsequently modified, and the appliances of a house must be "old." Age was the only qualification. A gentleman was heard buying, in a shop in town, some old chairs the leather of which was torn. It was explained to him that the rents could easily be mended; but he utterly refused to have them touched. Their appearance of age was their value in his eyes, and this appearance was enhanced by their torn and ragged condition. The shape and make, the mellow colour, and other characteristics of age were nothing to him; the mere fact of age was everything.

A gardener knows that when he buds his roses he must carefully suit his briars to the roses he is going to graft on them, for if the briar is too strong for the graft, it will overpower it and throw out branches from its own plebeian stem instead of nourishing its gentler-born nursling. In this gentleman's case, the briar was evidently too strong for the artistic ideas he had attempted to graft upon it.

As a rule, people take what is established without question, without it occurring to them that there is anything wrong with it. They have no innate sense of fitness to be offended; all they want to know is whether it is in accordance with the prevailing fashion; but, as soon as the

unknown authority that settles these matters decides that an alteration is to be made, the new thing is right and the old intolerable.

It is to be hoped, therefore, that our domestic art authorities will soon turn their attention to some of our daily surroundings which sadly want reform.

What can be more hideous than that flat slab, stuck in the wall without visible support, which does duty as a mantel-piece in most houses? It is impossible to look at it without an uneasy feeling that it ought to tumble down; a feeling which we accentuate by putting on the shelf heavy ornaments like clocks and bronzes. Almost the only suggestion modern taste has made on the subject, is to disguise the shelf by putting on it a trumpery nondescript thing made up of little shelves and pieces of looking-glass, and patches of velvet stuck about with bits of china and other meaningless ornament. The eye demands that whatever has to bear a weight shall have an adequate support. The old solid mantel-pieces, with only such shelf as could be made in the thickness of the material, were good. They could evidently bear all the weight that was put upon them, and gave opportunity for carving and other graceful ornamentation that made a pleasant resting-place for the eye. Even our modern shelves could be made unobjectionable by the support of brackets, which themselves give scope for graceful design.

Glass is another thing that wants the reforming energy of an artistic genius. The glass itself, the material, is exquisite now. It is made as clear as a diamond and as thin as a bubble. There never was anything of the kind so beautiful before as far as we have any evidence; and now and then the manufacturers get hold of a good shape. The things of every day use, however, wine glasses for instance, are, as a rule, utterly bad. Among the things to which the modern revived taste objected was our fathers' glass, and, in rebellion against their heavy shapes, the artistic genius of the day invented "straw-stemmed" glasses. From the manufacturer's point of view, no doubt straw-stemmed glasses are good. Their use must give considerable impetus to trade; but it is the only merit they have. It is difficult to conceive anything more inartistic than one of our big modern glasses full of wine, supported on a stem that the least shake will break, and with nothing to protect the bowl from being pierced by its thin pedestal. Had the



designer studied the formation of a rose, he would have seen how to avoid that radical mistake. The tall, narrow glasses our fathers used for champagne, were at all events graceful, even if they were a little difficult to drink out of; but our glass saucers stuck on spikes have nothing to recommend them.

In our plate too we have improved very little. Plate, like wine, improves with keeping. Use rounds off too obtrusive angles, and gives a softness of outline which cannot be produced with tools. If the lines are true, and the material solid, use only softens down and mellows the outline.

In our plate of the present day the workmanship is excellent. The mechanical finish, the surfaces, and so on, leave nothing to be desired, but of imagination it shows little trace. The public for whom the silversmith caters do not want imagination. They want the money they mean to expend on the purchase spread over as large a surface as possible; and so the silversmith rolls out his metal into a very thin sheet, and moulds it into shape with a machine. If ornament is wanted it is stuck on. Such work as this must needs be painful to artistic eyes, but it gives you bigger and cheaper things.

Now and then you see silversmiths with artistic instinct rebelling against this debasement of their handicraft, and turning out very beautiful work; but they do it more for their own satisfaction than from any hope of profit from it. Modern eyes are satisfied with the Houses of Parliament, and find no music in the roof of Westminster Abbey.

Silver work finds its lowest depth however in that dreadful thing, a piece of presentation plate. Who does not know it? An unsupported vine standing erect, and bearing on its topmost leaves and tendrils a group of cut-glass dishes. Those whose memories go far enough back remember that those dishes bore chutney, and olives, and anchovies, and such like things, during dinner, and, when the cloth was removed, were replaced by other dishes containing fruit. The vine tendrils were equally appropriate in each case.

Another development was a collection of silver dolls. If the recipient were a merchant the dolls carried bales on their backs or led draught animals. If he were a soldier or a sailor he had little silver representations of his own men. We have so far improved now that we do not always trust our own invention. When we have

to make such a presentation we prefer to copy models that have received the approval of many generations, but we have not yet arrived at the creation stage.

It is hazardous to criticise women's dress. Fashion has nothing to do with fitness, and women's dress is governed by fashion alone. Men groan over the terrors of trains, and will continue to groan, until trains give place again to the still greater absurdity of crinolines. There is a barbaric splendour in a great lady sweeping through palatial rooms, with her train flowing in graceful curves behind her; but the sight of Mrs. Jones gathering up her long skirts, and forcing them into the small space allowed to her in a crowded suburban drawing-room, is painful to those whose sense of humour is not of that robust kind that rejoices in the ludicrous. Chaucer declaimed against trains, and our great-grandsons will no doubt continue to do the like. A few years ago some women made a feeble attempt to popularise a prettier style of dress, but the female aesthete took the idea and burlesqued it to death. The vagaries of female fashion are among the things that men have to bear as they best can. We can at least be thankful that we have not as yet returned to the crinoline age.

About jewellery one need not be so reticent, seeing that most of it is at all events bought by men, and about modern jewellery there is not much good to be said. The jeweller's taste seldom seems to go beyond dumping precious stones into lumps of gold, like plums in a pudding. They are so pleased with the idea that they repeat it in locket, in rings, in earrings, in bracelets—even in clocks and table ornaments. It is the rarest thing to see any grace of form or originality of idea in their work. The ancient Egyptians were fond of making gold ornaments in the shape of serpents and reptiles. Many of them are found in the Pyramids, and you can see at a glance what kind of serpent the smallest ring made in that shape is intended to represent. The finish is not as good as you will see in Bond-street, but then you cannot identify the species of a Bond-street serpent. Silversmiths, and goldsmiths, and jewellers will, however, tell you if you ask them about it that they are obliged to make what will sell. People like to have what other people are buying, and they will not have anything to which they are not accustomed until it has received the sanction of some

authority in which they believe. The average people require guidance in their taste, as well as in their religion and their politics.

In painting and music we have less cause to grumble. If few great pictures are produced now, at least there is plenty of good work, and Nature is reproduced with a tenderness and insight seldom before attained to; while no one need listen to bad music when a Saturday Popular Concert can be heard for a shilling.

In the matter of domestic architecture also we have made some advance. We have rebelled against the square-box architecture of our fathers, and though we build six-roomed "Queen Anne" houses with balconies into which a cat can scarcely squeeze itself, at least we have many buildings that are pleasant to the eye. The genius of the age runs rather into the line of mechanical than of artistic invention, but after all in many things a revived taste chooses good models for imitation and gives some hope of coming creative genius.

#### NOSEY BLAKE AND HIS GALAXY.

NOSEY BLAKE'S Galaxy, like political, literary, artistic, dramatic, and most other galaxies, is a galaxy of talent. At least it claims to be so, and that boldly and "in print." Their special line of talent is the pugilistic. Nosey Blake, the landlord—or as he is usually styled in the window-bills announcing benefits at his house, "Mine Host"—of The Bull and Butcher, is a "professor of the manly art of self-defence," and his galaxy consists of those whom he employs as "practical exponents of the noble science." As there is no college for granting—or even selling—pugilistic degrees, it may be assumed that Nosey's title of professor is self-conferred. But he is not without legitimate claim to so style himself. In his day and way he was numbered with the mighty men of valour. He belonged to the old school of fighting men, and flourished in the latter part of the "palmy" era of the fistic ring. His name figures in the pugilistic roll of fame, "Fistiana," and the record of his performances in the roped arena are chronicled in the pages of "Bell." When "mellared" with drink—and he often is so mellared—he is more than willing to fight his battles o'er again; to toe the scratch, and show how "mills" were won in the brave days of old. "To witness if he lies," the cuttings from "Bell's Life," neatly scrap-booked in

chronological order, are "to be seen at the bar." The same scrap-book likewise furnishes proof that Nosey has even been celebrated in verse. On one of its leaves is to be seen pasted a copy of the Broadsheet, in which a ballad-monger of the Catnach press has sung of the battle between Nosey Blake and Bill Burgess, alias Fishy, alias Live Eels. The ballad opens by calling upon "all sportsmen bold, and lovers of fistic fame," to give ear while the poet relates how

"Two heroes bold  
Fought for the wreath of victory and a hundred  
pounds in gold"

It then goes on to give the details of the battle in very slangy phraseology, and strangely varied and halting versification. It describes how the heroes

"Did gaily toe the mark, as if it were a lark one  
might suppose,  
And went to work ding dong, and neither was far  
wrong  
As they landed straight and strong—on the nose."

#### How

"First blood went to Nosey, and first knock down  
to Bill;"

#### And how

"Bill did stop, and Nosey prop, and both did get  
away."

As the battle progressed, Nosey, we are informed, "took the lead," whereupon—

"At six to four and three to two the bets went  
freely round  
That Nosey bold would win the fight before he left  
the ground."

As a matter of fact he did win, and the reader of the ballad is called upon to

"Drink success to Nosey bold all in a flowing  
bowl,  
Who gained the wreath of victory and the hundred  
pounds in gold."

But the poet, while he lauds the victor, does not go upon the principle of woe to the vanquished, for he further calls upon his hearers to

"Drink a glass to Bill also, who did his best to win,  
For his backers were well satisfied although they  
lost their tin."

In addition to these printed memorials, there are likewise "to be seen at the bar," the silk handkerchiefs, technically known as the "colours," which bound the manly waist of Nosey in his various encounters in the "roped arena," together with the fighting-boots and pants worn by him in his great battles with Sledge-hammer Wilkin-son—the battle in which he got his scar of honour in the shape of a broken nose, and

in which, though he suffered defeat, he was held to have covered himself with glory, by reason of the "gameness" which he displayed.

"You would hardly believe, to look at me now, I used to fight at eleven stone," Nosey will sometimes regretfully remark, and it certainly would require an effort of imagination to picture the Nosey of to-day as an athlete. At the present time he is over fifty years of age, and has waxed exceeding fat and scant of breath. He is Falstaffian as to figure, Bardolphian as to countenance—so much so indeed as to have been made a subject for scornful jests in those respects. On one occasion for example, while disguised in liquor, he fell into a cellar and became wedged there. A rescue party of the galaxy was sent for to free him, but upon arriving at the scene of action they professed to be unable to extricate him by hand power. Going to a neighbouring workshop they borrowed a set of shear-legs with block and tackle, and obtained the assistance of a gang of labourers. Returning thus provided, they slung the chains around the fallen man, and then hoisting away with a will brought him up as though he had been a pocket of hops. Then for some minutes they kept him struggling and spluttering in mid air to the intense delight of a jeering and howling mob, who, having "got the office," had assembled to witness the sport provided for them. Another time one of the galaxy, in the course of a quarrel with his chief, earned quite a reputation as a wit, by sarcastically suggesting that Nosey should "put himself in the hands of a vet, and get cured of the rinderpest"—a saying that was considered a happy and delicate hit at the inflammatory and be-pimpled condition of Nosey's features. But if familiarity has introduced a spice of contempt into the regard in which Nosey is held by near neighbours and immediate associates, he may still on the whole be described as a highly respected personage.

Many there are who are proud to know him or be noticed by him, and those of a class much higher in the social scale than his neighbours or the members of his galaxy. Locally, the trade of The Bull and Butcher is but a pot-house trade, but the house does not depend to any considerable extent upon local custom. It is a sporting house—the police authorities and sterner critics generally are unkind enough to describe it as a low sporting house—but however that may be it is as a sporting

house that it thrives. In its capacity of sporting "crib" it is "used" by numbers of young "swells" and would-be swells, mostly young fellows who fondly imagine that they are seeing life and graduating as men of the world. It is a well-known resort of the boxing fraternity, and is patronised by a variety of other sporting characters—by self-styled bookmakers, who are probably not wronged by being suspected of belonging to the welshing brigade; dog breeders, and trainers and fanciers of the type generally credited with combining a little judicious dog-stealing with their ostensible calling; the smaller fry of rowing and running men, and their backers, managers, and "owners." It is chiefly, however, in relation to pugilism that the house is a "draw," and in that connection Nosey Blake is distinctly king of the castle. Compared with the members of his galaxy—the best of whom he is wont to assert would have been a mere "chopping-block" to him in his best day—he is as a triton amongst minnows. They are only glove men, are unchronicled and unknown, while, as already intimated, Nosey figures on the bead-roll of (pugilistic) glory, and has been made famous by the pens of the sporting chroniclers of old. To the young swells who frequent the house the gallant and song-celebrated Nosey is an object of hero worship. They regard him as the representative of days in which there were giants, as one

"Meet for a time when force was fame."

To shake hands with him; to be seen in his company; to be of the audience, fit but few, to whom he recounts the incidents of his more notable fights; they esteem privileges. They delight to honour their hero, and the hero, it must be confessed, delights to be honoured—in the fashion of honouring that prevails at The Bull and Butcher; the fashion namely of "standing" drinks. It is a leading article of Nosey's trade creed that a landlord, being above all others bound to consider "the good of the house," should never refuse an invitation to drink at a customer's expense. In this respect he certainly acts up to his creed. He never does refuse an invitation to drink, and he has probably imbibed as much bad and fabricated champagne as any man breathing. For keeping "the good of the house" strictly in view, he invariably names champagne as his tipple when asked to drink. This custom of "mine host" sometimes leads to an amu-



sing bit of comedy in real life. Occasionally some "masher" dressed youth trading on his appearance and with "more brass in his face than in his pockets," will, while on a first visit to The Bull and Butcher, ask its redoubtable landlord "what he will take?" The question is put with a money-no-object air, but the thoughts of the pinchbeck masher are of two of whiskey cold, or of three of rum hot, or at the outside "a glass of sherry wine." When therefore Nosey, in the tone of one conferring a favour, replies, "I don't mind if I crack a bottle of sham with you," the rash imitator of what he believes to be "swell form" looks unutterable things. If by the sacrifice of his all in the way of pocket-money he can, in the phraseology of Nosey himself, who has a grim sense of the humour of the situation, "muster up the pieces, he outs with 'em," trying, though generally unsuccessfully, to smile and look indifferent. As a rule, however, this type of young man of the day cannot "muster up the pieces." Under the circumstances here in view he is wise enough to know that it would not do to "put side on"; to talk of people trying to "have" him, or anything of that kind. Having put his foot into it by trying to do the grand, there is nothing for it but to slink off, which he does, amid the jeers of other customers and the oburgations of the galaxy. The latter worthies consider that they have a personal and material interest in the matter. Save on rare and festive occasions they do not expect to have champagne, but "swells as is swells" are in the habit of "standing" them more plebeian drinks. In their opinion the man who, dressed as a "'owling swell," is capable of making himself parlour company at The Bull and Butcher, while lacking pieces or the will to spend them in standing treat, is one "whom it were base flattery to call a villain."

Nosey Blake, seated in his own parlour, "faced" by a knot of young swells of the right—that is the money-spending, champagne-standing—sort, is a study. With the portraits of a line of champions, from Tom Cribb to Tom Sayers, looking down upon him, with cigar in mouth, his glass in hand, his bottle at his elbow, the scrap-book, the fighting costume and colours on exhibition, a group of admirers hanging on his words, and the brighter stars of the galaxy flitting about—Nosey, set in these surroundings, is quite a picture. So much and so literally so that, on the occasion of

the annual benefit of the proprietor of the local music hall, the great attraction of the evening is the realistic scene, "The Parlour of the Bull and Butcher," with the great Nosey himself presiding.

As between Nosey Blake and his galaxy it is a case of Eclipse first, the rest nowhere. But with the great gun out of comparison the galaxy are persons of consideration—in their way. They are held by others besides themselves to be a very complete team, ranging as they do from Bantam Johnson, who barely scales seven stone, to Nosey's Big 'un, who stands six feet two in his stockings, and has to train hard to get down to thirteen stone ten. It comprises several men in each of the three divisions of light, middle, and heavy weights, and includes left-handed and other special, not to say phenomenal, performers. As it is esteemed both honourable and profitable to belong to Nosey's team, mine host of The Bull and Butcher has his pick of the profession, and being a good judge of talent, his galaxy are really expert boxers, are quite entitled to their description of "practical exponents of the art of self-defence." They can generally "give a bit of a start and a beating" to the best of the amateurs who come to practise with them—if it is their cue to do so. If they can depend upon the good sense and good temper of amateurs who specially stipulate that they are to do all they know against them, they show their form, and a good display of boxing will ensue. But as a rule their aim is not to box up to their own form, but to suit themselves to the form of their patrons. The swells, they reason, do not come there to be knocked about; they come because they fancy themselves, and their liberality is likely to be proportioned to the degree with which they are impressed with the belief that they have held their own, or even had a shade of the best of it, with a professional. The object of the professional is therefore to box down to that shade. Occasionally, however, if the self-satisfied amateur waxes very "bounceable," or happens to "land a stinger," the professional throws prudence to the winds, and goes for his man, who suddenly finds himself reduced from the give-and-take level to the position of being "receiver-general." It is in the bouts between themselves, that the members of the galaxy really become practical exponents of the noble science. To the connoisseurs frequenting The Bull and Butcher, the great

boxing treat is a "set-to" between two of the star "glovers," with the great Nosey judging and calling the points.

Apart from their professional position, the galaxy are a very mixed and very rough lot. They are a powerful set of fellows, but their greatest admirers could not speak of them as handsome. Low foreheads, beetling eyebrows, small and sunken eyes, snub noses, and heavy jowls are the typical characteristics of their features. They are bullet-headed, and look markedly so by reason of the fact that they always keep their hair closely cropped. That is "the thing" professionally, and in their case it has the advantage that if they have been "in trouble"—a thing that frequently happens with one or other of them—the "state of the poll" on their return from exile does not attract attention, does not of itself suggest that they have been "doing time." The galaxy affect what is considered to be a sporting style of dress—tight-fitting trousers, cut away and much bepocketed coats, highly coloured silk handkerchiefs tightly "wiped" round the throat, and close-fitting caps, which, in conjunction with their closely cropped hair, "show off" their abnormally large ears to what most people would regard as a great disadvantage. Only one of the galaxy—Chumpy Ellis—it may be remarked, can boast of the distinction of the trade-mark—a broken nose. And even he is a fraud in that connection. He leads outsiders to infer that it is an honourable scar received in battle, and the belief that such is the case brings him many a drink for which otherwise he would not come in. As a matter of fact, it is a scar at which his acquaintances jest. They know that it is anything but a scar to be proud of; that the wound was received in brawl, not battle, that, in fact, it was inflicted by the hand of a woman—wielding a quart pot—whom he was "slogging" in the course of a public-house row.

Some few of the galaxy who, in addition to being in more general request among the patrons of The Bull and Butcher, have got "private lesson" engagements, manage to knock out a living as boxers. The bulk of them have to turn their hands to other things also to "make a do of it." They will undertake the rôle of "Big Dog" to young swells who are seeing life; or they will procure the vermin for gentlemen given to the noble sport of ratting; or act as agents between dog dealers and dog

buyers. If they can hook on to athletic associations as odd-job men, they will do so for what they can pick up, preferring money of course, but taking liquors or cast-off clothing if nothing better is to be had. On the strength of their acquaintance with sundry "waterside characters" they sometimes do a little trade in spirits, tobacco, and cigars, which, with all the mystery and mannerisms of the turnpike-sailor type of bold smuggler, they allege to be contraband. If the allegation is true, the excise authorities are in these cases avenged, for the goods are of such a quality that they invariably make the consumers ill. In this connection it may be mentioned that minor members of the galaxy occasionally earn a shilling or two, and their "bacca," by colouring pipes for young swells, who, as smokers, are more ambitioned than seasoned.

In the summer season some of Nosey's team attend certain races and fairs as leading performers in a boxing booth company, while in the winter they frequently obtain engagements to keep order at public meetings. At least that is how those who employ them on such occasions put it. Less euphemistic, the galaxy themselves speak of such engagements as chucking-out jobs. It is darkly whispered that there are those among the galaxy who for a consideration will undertake to "bash" any victim pointed out to them by their employer for the time being. Lastly, one or two weaker brethren among Nosey's satellites have been known, when very hard pressed, to take a day's honest labouring. Such a proceeding upon their part, it need scarcely be said, is regarded by the general body of the Talent as being highly derogatory, and the sort of proceeding that, if persevered in, would righteously involve loss of caste.

While the rank and file of Nosey Blake's galaxy are willing to turn their hands to a variety of such things as those indicated above, the police are unkind enough to be disposed to rank them with the no-visible-means-of-support class, and the authorities probably have good grounds for such a classification. As already hinted, members of the galaxy occasionally become subjected to prison discipline, and the offences which lead to their periods of enforced retirement, though frequently, are not always assaults. It is the interest of these men to pose as a sort of modern gladiators, and sundry gilded and other youths, being in their green and salad days, and young in judg-

ment, are given to—in more senses than one—treating them as gladiators. The prosaic truth is, that they are little else than sheer ruffians. Their strength and science only makes them brutal, and their brutality is untempered by any gleam of chivalrous feeling. They are in a certain sense a curiosity of civilisation. A few years ago their type seemed to have reached a vanishing point, while such a house as The Bull and Butcher, and such a landlord as Nosey Blake, would have been chiefly interesting as illustrating a phase of life which had apparently passed away never to return. But so much could scarcely be said in the present day. Within the last year or two there has been a distinct, if not an obtrusive, revival of pugilism. Many more "little mills" than those of which some record finds its way into the papers are brought off, and men of the Nosey Blake's galaxy type are flattering themselves that there is a good time coming for them. Since this revival movement set in the first rankers of the galaxy have been "on the job" in the old-fashioned prize-fighting line.

Among a certain set it is quite understood that whenever any syndicate of swells or "sports" like to subscribe a purse of twenty, ten, or even five sovereigns, Nosey and his "aides-de-cong" will find the men to fight for the money. Often enough these fights are "arranged" in a double sense. That is to say, after they have been arranged by the backers, the principals come to a private arrangement, under which they agree to divide the stakes and settle who is to win, and that they shall not knock each other about to any greater extent than is absolutely necessary to make a good show. But many of these affairs are genuine, and in proportion to their genuineness is their brutality. That there will be a full-blown re-establishment of the prize-ring, as a public institution, need not be feared. Nevertheless, the revivalistic movement in that direction is bad as far as it goes, and ought to be crushed. To talk of prize-fighting as an incentive to, or illustration of, pluck or endurance is nonsense, is the innocent talk of greenhorns, or the interested talk of those who trade upon them. Boxing is no doubt a capital exercise, and "the manly art of self-defence" a thing to be desired; but it is the interest alike of the art and the artists that they should be dissociated from forms of ruffianism, which they cannot touch without being defiled.

## STUDIES OF OVER THE WAY.

## A HOUSE IN THE EUSTON ROAD.

## IN THREE PARTS. PART I.

MY tenancy of the rooms I engaged in the above-named thoroughfare was a very short one; but, short as it was, it was not unfruitful, and in one respect it was peculiar. Never before or after did I succeed in unravelling the thread of the over-the-way mystery without the aid of Simpson; but the story of the young man who lived opposite to me in the Euston Road I mastered by myself alone, and I am rather proud of it on that account.

On the very first morning after I had taken possession, I espied the pale face of my opposite neighbour at the window. He was a very handsome young man, but one could hardly think of his good looks for the terrible seal of melancholy which fate or misfortune had stamped upon his countenance. He sat still, staring into vacancy, till a quarter to eleven, and then he disappeared. At eleven the front door opened and he came out, leaning upon the arm of some one who looked like a confidential servant, and the two walked away westward. At one o'clock they returned, and then till the dusk fell I could see the young man's face at the window, except in certain short intervals which I concluded were taken up with meals.

Day after day this was the unvarying routine. At the end of a week I began to get restless, and, as Simpson did not appear, I determined to do a little investigation on my own account. One fine day I followed my neighbours in their morning walk, and found that they repaired to the ornamental water in the Regent's Park, and spent an hour or so in feeding the ducks. I passed and repassed them several times, but found no opportunity of entering into conversation with them. The elderly man broke up the biscuit and threw it to the water fowl, but his companion took no heed of it. The handsome young man sat gazing as sadly and as vacantly at the ducks and the children here, as I had seen him before surveying the cabs and omnibuses in the Euston Road.

For four days I deserted the study of metaphysics at eleven a.m., and did my bit of amateur spying, and all with no result. I was indeed beginning to feel that I was certainly not a born detective, and to long more ardently than ever for the return of Simpson, when on the fifth



fate was kind to me, and gave me the opportunity of getting a word in private with the sad-faced, handsome young man. It fell out as follows.

The two were sitting in their accustomed place by the ornamental water, and I was located on a bench a few yards in the rear. The ducks and geese were enjoying the bits of biscuit, and a lot of children down by the brink were seemingly as much pleased at the sight of the feast, as if they themselves were demolishing cakes and strawberry creams. All at once one of the little ones, a curly-haired darling about five years old, staggered down the slope, and before she could recover herself fell into the water. Even the young man gave a start of excitement, and his companion sprang up at once and dashed into the water after the child, who by struggling had by this time been carried several yards from the land. No sooner, however, did the young man find himself alone than he started up from the bench and took to his heels as if the police were after him. The police—represented by the vigilant officer on duty, who was engaged in peeling an orange—took no heed of him; but I did. By the time he was clear of the Park I was within ten yards of him. I kept this distance between us till I saw him turn into a coffee-house, and then I followed him straightway, and in a minute's time was sitting in the same box with him face to face.

As soon as he saw me he gave a terrified start, showing that my face was not strange to him. "Sir," he said, "for several days I have noticed you in the Park, and, attracted by your benevolent countenance, I have more than once determined to lay before you my wretched state. If you have now a few minutes to spare, I will beg of you to give me a hearing; and, if I do not convince you that I am the most ill-used man in London, your looks strangely belie you."

"I can assure you, sir," I replied, "that I shall listen to your story with great pleasure. I, too, have remarked you and your companion in your daily walk, and have learned to take an interest in you; and here allow me to congratulate you on the possession of so brave a man as your friend. How splendidly he rushed to the rescue of that drowning child! I fear though that, during the winter months, rheumatism will remind him of the noble deed."

The young man smiled bitterly as he listened.

"Friend, ha! you little know what you are saying. Friend? He is my bitterest foe! That man keeps me a stranger to all that makes life worth having. I am, so my friends declare, a harmless lunatic, and the man from whom I have just escaped is my keeper. Ever since a strange adventure which befel me some years ago, I have been under his charge—a strange state of things in free England. My story is this: About a year ago I was with my brother, staying at a quiet watering-place on the south coast. During my last year at Oxford I had keenly taken up the study of biology, and I was at the period above named engaged in getting together some materials for a brochure to disprove the pretensions which certain persons, calling themselves mesmerists or electro-biologists, were then putting forward and raising no small excitement thereanent. My brother was an enthusiastic naturalist, and would spend the whole day hunting for fossils in the cliffs, or sea-weed on the beach; but in the evening he would, now and then—in a spirit of banter, I fancy—take up the position of a believer in the semi-supernatural rubbish I was labouring to discredit. But we were none the worse friends on this account. There could never have been a more perfect example of brotherly relations than that which existed between us till that ill-starred day, when my brother, in common with the rest of the world, arrived at the conclusion that I was not fit to manage my own affairs. But I must tell you it was not brotherly affection, nor the search of literary quiet which attracted me to L—. I was engaged to be married, and Kate Lawson, my fiancée, was living then with her uncle, Mr. Sinclair, and it was on account of a certain matter connected with Mr. Sinclair that the first cloud of estrangement between my brother and myself arose. When I first introduced my brother to the family at the Abbey he was almost as much taken with the uncle as I had been with the niece; but by degrees a coolness grew up between them, and my brother, who was not a good dissembler, soon let it be seen that Mr. Sinclair was no favourite of his. 'He's a queer fellow, Bob,' he said to me one evening, as we sat smoking, 'and the sooner you take Kate away out of his influence the better it will be for both of you.'

"But what do you mean, Jack, by such a vague expression as that? You surely don't intend to bring any charge against Sinclair's moral character. There is no

one in the place so much esteemed and respected.'

"I say nothing about his morals, either pro or con. I say that his influence is unwholesome and uncanny. If I did not fear to put you in a towering rage, I should say that he really possesses a sort of mesmerism power—a power to which you yourself, with all your scepticism, would fall an easy victim.'

"Oh come, this is a little too strong!' I said, firing up.

"There, I said how it would be,' Jack went on with provoking coolness, 'but all the same I maintain that he has an influence over you. Whenever you happen to meet him, I notice that you are restless and unstrung for hours afterwards. I have noticed too, over and over again, that you cannot keep your eyes off his face.'

"I was too angry to answer—all the more angry because I was forced to admit to myself that there was a grain of truth in what Jack had just said.

"Sinclair certainly was a most fascinating man. Nobody could deny that. His well-formed intellectual features with his pleasant, half-sarcastic smile; his entertaining manners, as far removed from affectation as from vulgarity; his figure modelled after manly symmetry, and as yet unbent with years; all combined to form one of the most charming companions that a man or woman could wish for. When he chose to give his social qualities free play, few could be more attractive. Yet I often detected, in the midst of genial pauses, a commanding not to say obtrusive expression in his eyes, which seemed to claim obedience; and at such moments I could not gaze upon those keen grey orbs without thinking, with a sort of shudder, that their quick intelligence and fire, unseen yet felt, were but the expressions of a mind capable of conceiving boldly and executing unscrupulously. In his presence I never felt perfectly at ease. An almost irresistible desire came upon me to gaze into his face and seek to fathom the meaning of his look—to pierce to the centre of that pupil, as it gathered to a flashing point or expanded with sudden radiating gleams. And yet the effort was painful, as painful as it was involuntary. It was one of those tendencies not yet explained by science, and on that account quoted by the vulgar as a glimpse of the supernatural; but I was not going to make myself uneasy about a certain peculiar expression in Mr. Sinclair's eyes. I cut the conversation short; but it was vividly pre-

sent in my memory as the next day I walked up a winding path, formed out of the face of the cliff, that led from the shore towards an undulating and well-wooded slope which formed one of the chief beauties of the little watering-place. It was enclosed, but the fences were so badly kept that it was almost public property, and was briefly termed the Park. Kate's uncle lived in a quaint old house at the further end, the former character of which survived in its name—the Abbey. One of its great charms consisted in its nearness to the Park. Mr. Sinclair had, unquestioned, cut a doorway through the high brick wall of his garden and used the Park as if it were his own.

"As I mused over my cigar, I heard some one approaching along the gravel, but hidden from my sight by a projecting mound. A second after, Sinclair himself appeared, strolling on with his eyes fixed upon the ground as if in deep meditation. To walk on seemed strangely opposed to my inclination, yet it would have been rude to turn back. A dread such as I had never before experienced took possession of me, but yet, summoning up all my resolution, I advanced to meet him. When I was within ten paces of him he raised his eyes and drew them slowly along my body from foot to head. I could feel a strange sensation, somewhat as if a snake were crawling upward over me, as his gaze rested upon me; but when his eyes met mine, a shocklike electricity thrilled through me, and I tottered to the side of the path. For an instant I seemed to lose all consciousness. Then I heard a quick, sharp exclamation, and in a moment more I was seated on the bank at the other side of the path, with a grasp like a vice on my arm. Sinclair had saved me from being precipitated over the cliff, where the fall would have been dangerous, if not fatal.

"Good heavens! Ferrers,' he exclaimed, 'what has come over you?'

"I staggered to my feet and, with muttered thanks for his timely aid, moved towards my lodgings, still supported by his arm. To his eager inquiries, I returned but confused answers, and never shall I forget my feeling of relief when I sank exhausted on the sofa of my sitting-room, and heard the door close behind him as he left the house. I was in no state to wonder at his sudden departure. The one idea present to my mind was that I had escaped a great danger, the nature of which I could not define. The very vagueness of my thoughts added to my apprehensions. It

was by this time nearly nine o'clock, and so, leaving a message for my brother, in case he should call, I retired mechanically to bed.

"But when sleep was wanted it refused to come. Hour after hour I rolled from side to side, hearing the town clock strike with tedious regularity, till, unable any longer to endure such toilsome rest, I sprang up and obtained a light. The night was warm, so, hastily slipping on my clothes, I threw up the window, and to while away the time lit a cigar. Soon, this too became monotonous, so, jerking the end into the street, I proceeded to explore a small book-case at the further end of the room. I found my worthy landlady had left it unlocked. The collection was evidently not her own—possibly some student's library left in her charge. My eyes ranged over one shelf after another, but I was difficult to please. Some of the books were familiar, some had unpromising titles, none were exactly to my taste. At last I came upon one with no title on the back, and out of the merest curiosity, I took it down and opened it. At the first two lines I read, I started; then, sinking into a chair, I composed myself, and read on. I shall not easily forget that paragraph. Coming so soon after my experience of the previous day, tallying so exactly, as it appeared, with my case, a mere assertion struck my excited fancy with all the force of truth, and bred in me spontaneous conviction. It ran as follows:

"It is a well known fact that some men, by their mere presence, obtain a wonderful ascendancy over others. The old belief in the Evil Eye may possibly have some foundation in natural laws. To what degree this influence may be acquired has not as yet been investigated by competent authorities, though numerous instances are said to be on record in which it has extended to every action, whether of the body or the mind."

"Was this the influence that Sinclair possessed over me? I answered instinctively. It was. Had my brain been less excited, I should no doubt have reflected more both as to the ground of the statement I had just read, and its application to myself. But rushing with or without reason to my conclusion, a huge dumb terror began to swell within me, and to paralyse all power of will. Trembling, I threw myself upon my bed once more, and tried to drown consciousness in sleep. But in feverish and transient dreams, I thought

myself deep down in slimy seas, sucked towards some half-described, unthinkable horror, entwined in a thousand fibrous coils; or sitting spell-bound before two monstrous eyes, behind which was a vague hideous shape, the fear of which chilled even fear to numbness—till with every effort of my nature I broke the spell, and woke.

"With the dark shadow of my dream still resting on my senses, the first resolve I made was never to see Sinclair again. But then there arose a vision of Kate's sweet face and soft brown eyes, and auburn hair, and the thought of her roused all my dormant energies and determined me to meet him, and by the force of a resolute will, to free myself from his control. Before long, pride came to my aid, and I sat for an hour putting my will against his, and, in imagination, winning the victory. I little thought then what was before me.

"By degrees my mind grew calmer, and, as the morning was breaking, I betook myself to bed again, and slept profoundly.

"When I awoke the sun was shining brightly in at my window. The birds chirped merrily overhead, and far away into the distance stretched the bright expanse of sea. It was impossible to be gloomy amid such universal joy. The events of the day before, the strange coincidence of the night, seemed like a dark dream that had passed away for ever, and I went down to breakfast with as light a heart as if nothing had occurred to disturb my equanimity. At twelve my brother called. He had heard that I had been indisposed the previous evening, and questioned me rather closely as to the cause, but seeing that my answers were evasive, and that his solicitude was somewhat troublesome, he changed the subject. I was to drive Kate out in the afternoon to a curious old ruin about ten miles away, and after that to dine at the Abbey. My brother had spoken the day before of business which would occupy him the whole day, and I was therefore surprised when he proposed to accompany me on the way, and stated that he intended to eat a mouthful of lunch with us at the Abbey before we started.

"Take your macintosh," he said, flinging it over my shoulder—an ugly, white, conspicuous thing, but useful enough in a shower. 'It's big enough to hold you both,' he said, laughingly surveying its ample folds. 'And you must take care of little Kate, you know.'



"On our road to the Abbey my thoughts once more reverted to Sinclair. In the full blaze of a summer's day, and with my practical brother by my side, I felt perfectly sceptical as to any influence Sinclair possessed over me, and I was on the point of telling my brother, as a joke, all my fancies of the previous night. But I remembered his admonitions, and felt too proud to own that they were not entirely ill-timed. What would I not now give to have told him all my mind!

"We entered the Abbey garden from the Park. Kate ran across the lawn to meet us, and cleared away the last shadow of unpleasant thought from my mind. She was vivacity itself, and even my sober brother was forced to smile at her playful sallies. Sinclair did not appear at lunch, but he sent a message excusing himself on the ground of a slight indisposition. He hoped to be able to see me at dinner. I could not help noticing that my brother seemed annoyed at Sinclair's absence.

"Lunch over, Kate tripped upstairs to prepare for the drive. My brother looked steadily at me for a moment, and then, as the carriage I had ordered drove up, departed without a word.

"I shall never forget that afternoon. The warm sun overhead, the gentle breeze, the quiet country lanes with their solemn vistas of trees, the ramble over the quaint old ruin, the drive homeward in the still golden sunset, and above all, Kate in a thousand moods, capricious, playful, tender, trustful, and loveable in all; but I must not continue thus, or I shall very justly merit all my brother's accusations. Yet, oh! the happiness of that halcyon day, and the black storm gathering from the night!

"During the whole of the afternoon, not a thought of Sinclair had presented itself. When, after our return, I entered the library, I found him pacing up and down before the fireplace, with clenched fists and knitted brows. He started as he caught sight of me, smoothed his features rapidly, and accosted me with unusual friendliness. He once more apologised for his absence at lunch, and expressed a hope that I was none the worse for my walk the previous evening. The contrast between his expression as I entered, and his present tranquillity, which I felt sure was only assumed, was by no means pleasant, and yet, such was the fascination of his address, when he chose to make himself agreeable, that all sense of annoy-

ance vanished as soon as it made itself felt. Still, I determined to be guarded. I thanked him for the assistance he had so promptly rendered me the day before, saying that I suddenly felt faint, and stumbled, but that I was now in my usual robust health. I then alluded, with courteous regret, to his indisposition in the morning, and we were soon, apparently, on the best terms in the world.

## VICTIMS.

By THEO. GIFT.

Author of "*Lil Lorimer*," "*An Alibi and its Price*,"  
*Etc., Etc.*

### CHAPTER XI.—A ROMANCE IN A RETROSPECT.

DR. MARSTLAND had not been exactly correct in his deductions when he suggested that in the days of his youth M. St. Laurent had run away with a lady's maid; but he had gone rather near the mark. Madame St. Laurent, it is true, was never a lady's maid; she only came from the class (a highly respectable one) from which upper servants are generally taken; her grandfather being a carpenter in the little town of Leytonstone in Essex, and her father a baker and confectioner of the same place who, from being the boy to take out the bread, had worked himself up by prudence and steadiness to the post of foreman, and had then married his employer's widow, succeeded to the business, put in a new plate-glass front, and become a leading member of the strictest Dissenting chapel in the place, before the birth of his only child, a daughter whom he named Joan, after his own mother.

This worthy baker had a brother, however, who, having succeeded to the carpenter's bench, married while still a mere lad, had three boys whom he buried one after another, and finally lost his wife within six months of the birth of a daughter, also called Joan, whom he speedily provided with a stepmother, a lady of uncertain temper, who presented him with any number of unruly boys, beat his daughter, and made him so miserable that he was glad to seek consolation from her in drink. The upshot of this was that, coming home one night from the public house in a state of helpless intoxication, he dropped a paraffin lamp among the shavings in the shop, and set the whole place on fire.

Shop, house, tools and furniture were all

burnt to the ground. Only the inmates were saved; and as poor James Higgs had not a penny in the savings' bank and very few friends (his brother not excepted) even to sympathise with him, he was obliged to begin life again as a journeyman carpenter and let his wife take in washing; while little Joan, who till then had attended a respectable day-school with her cousin (now called Jane for greater gentility) was forced to bring her education to an end, and return home to assist in the housework.

Some people thought John Higgs might have come forward to assist his relatives, and indeed he did go so far as to take his eldest nephew into the shop; but as the lad was dismissed a fortnight later for idleness and disobedience, and as Mrs. James immediately called on Mrs. John and gave her "a piece of her mind," the baker retaliated by bidding his brother keep "that woman and her brood" from ever crossing his doorstep again. After this the relations between the two families became so strained that nearly all communication between them ceased, and would have done so altogether but for the lame and intermittent friendship still kept up between the girl cousins.

They had been almost like sisters, those two little pale, red-haired, freckle-cheeked girls; but after Joan, unable to bear her stepmother's nagging, had at thirteen found a "little place" for herself as nurse-maid to the butcher's baby, while Jane, aged eleven, was still learning "To Have and To Be and the Rule of Three," wearing neatly-braided black aprons and frilled pantalettes, the intimacy naturally decreased; and though they still continued to write to one another even after Miss Jane Higgs had been promoted to a still more genteel "seminary for young ladies," the correspondence soon died out, owing to that young lady's natural shame at the mirth evoked in her chief friends, (the Baptist minister's daughter, and the principal draper's "young ladies,") by the sight of one of poor Joan's grubby and ill-written letters addressed to "Miss Higgs At miss Smith's Simmary," and commencing, "my oan Deerest Kuzzin."

For even then Jane Higgs had started on the path which eventually carried her so far; and had shown herself not only a clever, plodding, cold-natured girl, but possessed of an amount of quiet ambition and narrow-minded tenacity of purpose not common among young people of either

sex. Her parents had originally intended to apprentice her, when her education was over, to some good milliner or dressmaker, so that in the event of anything happening to them, or her not marrying, she might be able to set up for herself in a respectable and paying business. But no sooner did Jane find out that the minister's daughter was being educated for a governess, as also that governesses—genteel governesses that is—might employ, but could not be intimate with milliners, than she decided on discarding the latter profession and going in for the former. Why not? If Selina Smith could learn well enough to teach others, why should not she with the same advantages? And with this end in view she plodded on at her books so persistently, as not only to induce her parents to give in to her views, but to obtain an offer from her schoolmistress on her sixteenth birthday of becoming a pupil teacher in that good lady's seminary, and so obtaining all future instruction, including even such extras as French, music, and deportment—dancing Mr. Higgs' religious views would not allow—without further expense to the baker's household.

The plan worked well with one exception. Plodding and drilling not only made Jane familiar before long with Murray and Mangnall, Walkinghame and Miss Corner, but taught her to use such refinements of speech as the words "chest" instead of "stomach," "limbs" instead of "legs," and "intoxicated" instead of "drunk"; to cast down her eyes in walking, sit on the edge of her chair in company, and spread out her little finger when drinking. By the time she was seventeen-and-a-half she had not only learnt to blush unaffectedly at her father's mode of substituting a knife for his fork, and her mother's misplacement of aspirates, but could write a French essay grammatically, and play through a set of quadrilles without a wrong note. The exception consisted of something which not even plodding seemed able to remedy. She could indeed write that French essay correctly, but when she came to read it no human being could have guessed in what language it was written. It was not only that "French of Paris was to her unknown," but she failed to imitate even the "French of Stratford-atte-Bow," spoken by her instructress, and this was the more distressing as Miss Smithers herself told her that without French nowadays a girl could never hope to earn her living as a governess.

Fortunately that lady could suggest a way out of the difficulty. A cousin of hers who had married a French dancing-master, and in conjunction with him kept a "*pension pour les jeunes demoiselles Anglaises et Françaises*" in an unfashionable part of Paris, was in want of an English teacher, and Miss Smithers offered Jane the post.

The difficulty, however, was to get her parents to consent to her taking it. She was their only child, and, in addition to the insular dislike for "furrin things" generally, inherent in the small British tradesman, Mr. Higgs held a rooted belief that Frenchmen in particular were all frog-eating, blaspheming card-sharpers; while Mrs. Higgs shuddered over them as a race of idolaters given over bodily to the devil, and felt sure that they would welcome Jane and her Bible with a summary "*auto da fé*," if they did not prefer the slower process of bricking up both in the wall of a convent.

Nevertheless, the daughter got her way, as indeed she had done in most things. It was not that her opinion of the French nation differed in any degree from that of her parents. What they believed she had been brought up to believe also, and, if she had progressed beyond their use of the aspirates, she had not done so beyond their prejudices. But with her the one thing just then to be considered was the improvement of her pronunciation, and, consequently, of her position, pecuniary and otherwise, as a teacher; and to this end she had even entered into communications with Madame Le Brun before applying to her parents for their consent.

That they did give it, after a fashion, at least, was a comfort to her in later years when she was a mother herself. But it was given with sore hearts, and the hearts would have been sorer still had they known, what in truth came to pass, that they would never see her again.

She was still at Madame Le Brun's two years later, and she had never had a long enough holiday to make it worth while to go home, when she first met M. St. Laurent. At that time she was not unlike Vera, with less, perhaps, of the latter's sweetness of expression and softness of outline; but taller, more alert in her movements, with a touch of fresh English red in her cheeks, and a few of those small, light-brown freckles, which Frenchmen always find so charming in relief to an otherwise fair skin. She could speak French now, but with a kind of broken stiffness and slowness, which,

coming from the pink lips of a very young woman, had an additional charm for M. St. Laurent.

However it was, he fell in love with her, and to no one's surprise more than his own. He was then thirty-two, jaded and blasé already by a life of self-indulgence; and his object in visiting the pension was to see after the welfare of one of the scholars, towards whom an intimate friend of his held certain parental obligations, which for reasons of a domestic nature it was not advisable for the latter to perform in his own person. The demoiselle in question being some twelve years old and big for her age, Madame Le Brun did not consider it proper for her to receive the visits of her guardian, or be taken out by him, except under the chaperonage of a governess, and, Miss Higgs being chosen for the purpose, St. Laurent found himself able to combine his benevolent surveillance of the youthful "*pensionnaire*" with a very warm and rapidly marching flirtation with her prim little governess, more easily than might have been expected.

Not that Jane flirted. She would not have been guilty of such a thing for her life. M. St. Laurent described her to a friend as being "*d'une farouche virginité*," "*d'une pudicité non plus menaçante que suggestive*"; but in truth there was to a man of his sort something inviting even in the menaces of a modesty which, being always on the defensive, suggested a knowledge of the dangers from which it was protecting itself.

And suggested it truly! Extreme prudence is indeed seldom compatible with perfect innocence, a fact proved every day by the follies and rashness into which young girls, brought up in that absolute ignorance of certain evils possible among the ranks of the upper ten, are so frequently betrayed by their very innocence and unconsciousness of danger. But to the children of the working classes this ignorance is not possible, and when our learned judges speak, as some have done, of the sin of offending it, they speak of an absurdity. Jane was as familiar from her infancy with such homely incidents as men getting drunk, or girls "going wrong," as young ladies in aristocratic schoolrooms are with the lesser errors of greediness and telling fibs. These former things were the common accidents of the class to which she rightfully belonged. She had only raised herself to that far less honest intermediary one which thinks it "nice" to affect the

ignorance it does not possess; and which in private giggles and whispers, or purses up its mouth and listens, to the discussions of social dangers, which it is none the less on the alert to avoid, because in public it makes believe to be unaware of their existence. Jane never giggled. Her early chapel training led her to be of those who only purse the mouth and listen; but she was always on the alert, and she made believe so skilfully, that, instead of taking her in, Monsieur was taken in himself. He believed her to be "*une vraie ingénue*," all the more because, while always keeping him at a distance, she never avoided or even appeared to dislike his society. She accepted his presents with modest thanks, but never suffered him even to snatch a kiss in requital; and thus, while thinking to compromise her, perhaps even secure her dismissal, and drive her to seek consolation in his arms, M. St. Laurent found somehow that he had compromised himself. Indeed, thanks to the prudent wariness of the maiden who, however flattered by her conquest of so great a gentleman, and won by his compliments and fascinations, not only managed to lose her heart without once losing her head; but even to secure Madame Le Brun's co-operation in her matrimonial efforts, the man about town woke one morning to find himself committed to a marriage of which assuredly he had never dreamt through the whole course of his courtship.

He submitted, and was married. Jane had won the day. She, the baker's little daughter, was Madame St. Laurent, the wife of a gentleman of family and fortune, with fine friends and connections, with carriage and horses, an estate in the country, and a box at the opera; and yet it may be said that, with the day of her marriage, Jane's troubles in life really began. In the first place, though a foolish and vulgar shame for her true position had led her, while her husband was still only her lover, to represent her parents as having merely "come down in the world for a time," and being "reduced by pecuniary losses to keeping a superior place of business," the petty deceit had not been any good to her. M. St. Laurent made it a "*sine qua non*" of marriage that she should drop all intercourse, save by letter, with her relations in England; aye, even with her father and mother, the good old people, who had worked so hard to raise themselves and her, who had been so fond and proud of her, and whose only

child she was. And Jane had consented; consented, but with a lingering pain which rankled uneasily in her religious and natural feelings.

Nor was this all. Once married, and in the first flush of gratified passion, St. Laurent was disposed to justify the step he had taken by showering presents and attentions on his young wife, taking her everywhere, and introducing her to his friends; and had the latter been only of his own sex and nation, the test might not have been such a dangerous one; since to these Jane was simply "*une jeune mees Anglaise*," and her awkwardness, stiffness, and want of conversation, due to the misfortune of a barbarous nationality. Unfortunately, however, there were her husband's women friends to be considered, and still more unfortunately it happened, that among these were the wife of the English Ambassador then accredited to Paris, and two or three other English and American ladies of good position belonging to the same circle, and these, finding that "that shocking *roué* St. Laurent" had actually married an English girl, were the more anxious to make her acquaintance. They made it; and—alas for poor Jane's aspirations!—from that day she learnt the bitterness of the Dead Sea fruit of empty ambition.

A fashionable bride, the wife of a man of property and position, who could not walk across a room with ease, lounge with grace, or take a gentleman's arm with dignity; who came from nowhere, seemed to have no family connections, and knew nobody; who was visibly distressed as to the question of "knife or no knife" with regard to fish, and hopelessly puzzled as to the use of a variety of wine glasses; who had never heard an opera, and thought the ballet "improper"; who owned to acquaintance with "Bow Bells" and the "Christian World," but not with Carlyle or Goethe; who said "Sir" in speaking to gentlemen, and "my lady" at every second word to the Ambassador; such a young woman had not only never been in society herself, but had never belonged to, or come in contact with persons in society either. She might have been a nursemaid, or a national school teacher (not a milliner or a lady's-maid, the ladies agreed, as in that case she would have had some idea of dressing herself); and as for St. Laurent, he had been guilty of a grave impertinence in introducing such a person into their exalted circle, and representing her as a



young lady, the daughter of well-born parents in reduced circumstances.

In effect Madame St. Laurent was dropped almost as soon as she was taken up, and Monsieur was made to learn the reason why; not only through the sympathetic confidences of certain of his friends, but by the chilling manner and restricted smiles of the great ladies themselves. Of course he was disgusted, furiously so, but, alas! more with his wife than with the fastidious friends who had weighed and found her wanting. In truth his brief passion, swiftly satiated and not kept alive by any charms of wit, conversation, or even sympathetic companionableness on the part of his young wife, was already dying out. He felt that he had made, or, as he put it, had been trapped into making, a hopeless *mésalliance*, and for the future took the easy course of ignoring it, leaving the bride whom society rejected at home, and going abroad "*en garçon*" himself, after the manner of old times, finding also consolations after the same manner for the pruderies, the timidity, and primness which, however provocative in a mistress, were unendurable in a wife.

At first Madame was rather glad of the change. She had made her plunge into society, and had been at once chilled and appalled by it. She had climbed to the top of the social tree, and felt about as comfortable there as a fish at the same arboreal altitude. The fine ladies she thought to ape so successfully, the genteel society in which she considered herself formed to move, had disappointed and flouted her. Though she could not understand one part in ten of their conversation, she understood that they had somehow fathomed her real position, and looked down on her as of erst she had looked down on her tipsy Uncle James and poor Joan. Though she was too dull to even detect the particular points in which she failed to pass muster, or to correct them, she was not too dull to detect that she was snubbed, and to feel irate thereat. For, indeed, if her ideas on the subject of dress (full dress especially) moved the fine ladies' mirth, theirs shocked her unaffectedly. If her vulgar little pruderies, affectations, and narrowness disgusted them, their breadth of ideas and careless coolness, their freedom and ease, puzzled and appalled her. It positively seemed to her like a going back to the jovial anarchism of the lowest class of all, and she would not, if she could, have

imitated it. Indeed, it was far easier to her to admire and model herself on the ceremonious courtesy and formal condescension shown her by the old French families; the venerable Comte de Mailly and his young wife in particular—persons of the "*ancien régime*," whose life-long intimacy with her husband gave them an influence over him which they would willingly have used for the benefit of his wife as well as himself.

It was the de Maillys, indeed, who had so often joined his lawyers in advising him to marry, and who were the only persons besides those functionaries who knew of the almost hopeless state of embarrassment into which St. Laurent had allowed his monetary affairs to drift; and it was therefore in the purest spirit of kindness that, when they saw that the marriage had so far failed that he was already drifting back into his old habits, the Countess decided on calling on the young wife, opening her eyes to the true state of the case, and urging her to use all her fascinations and influence with her husband to induce him to give up Parisian life altogether, and settle himself on his estate in Brittany, where, with economy and mutual affection, the couple might yet lead a life of homely dignity and domestic affection.

Unfortunately poor Jane had neither the breadth nor generosity of spirit necessary for taking the kindly-meant counsel well. She had not been in ignorance of her husband's character when she married him; but then to girls of her kind it seemed a natural and accepted thing that gentlemen should be "*a little gay*," and addicted to ruining girls who were "*silly*" enough to let them. They steadied down after marriage of course; and when she saw, or suspected, that in St. Laurent's case this "*steadying down*" had not taken place, it was more consonant with her own character to affect ignorance of the wrong done to her, and swallow her mortification in private, than to either shrink in horror from the sinner or try, from the depths of her own love and purity, to win him back to virtue. That the de Maillys should be aware of her humiliation was therefore a reason for Jane to dislike them with all the rankling intensity of a petty nature, and to take a small pleasure in repulsing their overtures of friendship; but in truth the loneliness of her position was almost unendurable, and her remorseful yearnings for the home and parents she had so lightly abandoned so added to it that she entreated

her husband to be allowed to leave him, if only for a visit of a few weeks to her father and mother.

St. Laurent refused, and the de Maillys encouraged him in doing so. It seemed to them indeed a peculiarly ill-judged request; not only because they had just succeeded in inducing him to give up his Paris residence and prepare to return to the home in Brittany he had so long neglected, but because Jane herself, being near her confinement, it appeared of all things desirable that the son and heir hoped for should be born under his father's roof-tree. And the poor woman submitted in silence. There was nothing else indeed for her to do, but perhaps distress of mind contributed to the fact that the son, when he did arrive, was born dead, and before she had fully recovered her strength again she received news of the decease of both her parents from small-pox within a fortnight of one another.

All vestiges of girlhood died within Jane St. Laurent from that day. Even the pink colour went out of her cheek, and the youthful lightness from her step, and, though she said little of her sorrow—always reticent, since her marriage she had become more so than ever—the signs of inward suffering were too apparent in her not to rouse all her husband's pity and tenderness; and, when she humbly begged him to allow her to engage the person who had nursed her parents through their last illness for her own personal attendant, he gave the required permission with positive cordiality. She did not say that the person was her own cousin Joan, who had left her place as general servant to perform the absent daughter's duties to her uncle and aunt. Madame St. Laurent had too much false shame still with regard to her connections, and too little trust in her husband, to dare to be frank with him even then; but she wrote plainly and urgently to Joan, concealing none of her woes and troubles, and entreating her to accept a home for life with a good salary and the position of housekeeper and confidential maid at Les Châtaigniers, on the one condition of not betraying the relationship between them.

And Joan consented; not without some contempt felt and expressed for her cousin's shufflings and cowardice, but with a shrewd practical perception of the advantages contained in the proposal for herself and those of her family who needed her help, and with only this condition in return. She

would stand by Jane to the death, and work for her as willingly as for anybody, but call her own flesh and blood "ma'am," or "missis," she wouldn't, not to save her life, and nothing would make her.

With this proviso, therefore, Joan—afterwards called Joanna, for greater grandeur—came, and with her coming Madame St. Laurent felt as if she had taken a great step in retrieval of her past shortcomings towards her family, and began to reap a speedy reward in the companionship and sympathy of her homely kinswoman. They had plenty to do and think of now, both of them, for M. St. Laurent's affairs were in a far worse state than he had in any way supposed, and it was only by most careful management and economy, aided by loans from the Comte de Mailly, that they were able to retain the property at all, and make both ends meet for some time. Fortunately for Madame these economies did not affect her, as they might have done a person used from childhood to the comforts and luxuries of life; and, still more fortunately, she developed, with the need of them, a perfect genius for household saving and good management, which filled her husband and even Joanna with surprise and admiration, and caused the former to regard her for the first time with something like positive respect. That a whole establishment should be kept up in decency and moderate comfort, and a margin afforded for his own "menus plaisirs" during the year with less expense than it cost him to maintain his bachelor apartments for a month, was a marvel to him—the one consolation for what he bitterly regarded as the cruelty of his exile from the only place where life was worth living—and if it was obtained at the cost of a niggardly parsimony both abroad and at home, grinding down of wages and illiberality to the poor, that mattered little to him. His long absence from Brittany had made him more Parisian than Breton in his sympathies, and it only roused a keen feeling of dislike against his wife among the deep-feeling, impulsive Bretons, already prejudiced against her by the fact of her alien nationality, and by whispers emanating from the kitchens at Mailly as to her plebeian origin.

And then Vera came!

M. St. Laurent had always been indulgent to his wife in one respect, he had not interfered with her religious views. In the beginning, indeed, he had taken it as a matter of course that she should go to

Mass; but that was when he was still "furiously" in love with her; and when she broke from her usual submissiveness to plead with more passion and fire than he had ever before seen in her, that she would rather be slain then and there than "bow her knee in the temples of Baal," he gave up the point.

To obtain the same liberty for a daughter, however, was a different thing, especially when the reckless pleasure-seeker of those days was transformed into the sulky and discontented country gentleman. But Madame made her petition just when her own health was so impaired by nursing him through a long and severe illness, that the doctors warned him that only the greatest care and consideration could avert the risk of a similar disappointment to that which had before overtaken them. St. Laurent made haste to pacify his wife, therefore, by granting her petition. It was only a hypothetical one after all, and he certainly hoped that no girl might arrive to call for its fulfilments; but, when a few weeks later, the girl did make her appearance, it must be said to his credit that he showed no disposition to go back from his word, or to prevent Madame from sending Joanna for the Protestant chaplain at Quimper and having the babe baptized before it was a month old.

He nicknamed it "La petite Huguenote," and cared very little for it from the first; but to his wife this was of small moment. What she wanted was her daughter for her very own; a daughter who should be always with her, never forsake her, never look down on her or imagine that it was possible for others to do so, but who should have no other guide than her mother's voice, no higher motive than her mother's will; and who withal should be in every particular "quite the lady;" not, perhaps, after the pattern of "those Paris women" of whom Madame still retained an uneasy and resentful recollection; but after that upon which she had desired to model herself in early days,—her own very superior and superfine teacher, Miss Smithers for example, and a certain Mrs. Jones, the wealthy widow of an ex-alderman and the leading lady in the gloomy little Dissenting congregation to which Jane had belonged. This was her double aim, to achieve which, and to achieve it so perfectly that her husband should have no excuse for taking her daughter from her, and sending her to some fashionable and godless boarding-school, while Vera on the other hand

should so grow up in dependence on her mother as to have no wish or ambition to leave her side, formed the one untiring endeavour, the one gnawing anxiety of her life. It was for this end that she so scrupulously attended to Vera's education, and modelled it on the pattern of her own, so that no strange or unsafe ideas might find their way to the girl's mind; for this end that Vera was never allowed to soil her gentility by speaking to the under-servants or peasantry in the neighbourhood, lest, in so doing, she should seem to betray an affinity with the working classes which might reflect on her mother; and withheld as far as possible from intimacy with girls in a superior station for fear they, on the other hand, should inspire her with any thing like discontent or dissatisfaction with her own home régime: for this end even that, when some supplementary teaching in music, etc., were found absolutely necessary, Leah was chosen in preference to several ladies advertising themselves as of high degree and aristocratic refinement, for the very reason of her supposed mediocrity and amenableness to Madame's patronage.

Poor mother! Such ceaseless striving, such constant anxiety for so poor an aim, so pitiful and narrow a summing up of a life unspeakably pitiful too in the very shallowness and vulgarity of its highest aspirations and bitterest disappointments; its entire absence of anything like one noble thought, one pure or lofty principle, one spark of that human passion or religious enthusiasm which can kindle equally in peer and peasant, and elevates both alike!

And, after all, she could not even keep the one object of all this watchfulness and jealousy for ever. Nay, she was not even to keep her as long as many mothers do. Vera was only fourteen when M. St. Laurent came to his wife with a communication which sounded to her like the death-knell of her brief happiness. At that time the girl was tall for her age and looked almost as full grown as she did at twenty, though with the contrasting charm of almost infantile softness of feature and delicacy of complexion; and it was this contrast which struck the present Comte de Mailly, as, visiting at Les Châtaigniers after an absence from Brittany of nearly two years, he came upon the maiden singing softly to herself, as she swung to and fro on the pendent bough of an old apple tree; and the picture was so charming a one that he crossed the grass to speak to her. Vera answered simply and shyly

enough; but with that indefinable sweetness of eye and languor of lip which she had inherited from her grandmother; and though the Count's Gallic sense of propriety did not permit him to detain her five minutes, he went straight from her to St. Laurent's study, and then and there made the proposal to him which it so overcame Madame to hear. She could hardly gasp her answer:

"Marry her! My Vera! That baby! Oh, it isn't possible."

Her husband cut her short roughly, and with that look in his eyes which always cowed her.

"Pas possible? Et pourquoi donc? Tiens, ma femme, art thou then still so 'bourgeoise' as to be unable to appreciate the pleasure of seeing thy daughter a Countess; or is it that thy mediocre training has unfitted her for the position of a lady of rank? Dame! but in that case it will be advisable to send her at once to the Convent of the Sacré Cœur, in Paris, to acquire a little polish and become like other demoiselles of position."

And before that threat Madame succumbed almost without resistance. In effect too was it not a grand thing for a woman of her mental calibre that her child, the baker's little granddaughter, should become the wife of a nobleman, the mistress of a magnificent chateau within a mile of her mother's roof, and where she could still live almost under the shelter of her mother's wing? In truth there were consolations in the picture; and when Joanna spoke of the Count's age, which was identical with that of Madame herself, and called it selling the child, the poor lady blushed nervously, and said:

"Ah, no, it's that which will make it safer for her. They—gentlemen I mean—get so much steadier when they are middle-aged. You see, yourself, Monsieur has done so; and after all it is in his hands. He might have proposed something worse, some one who would have taken her quite away; while now—who knows what may happen before she is grown up!"

For Madame had made one stipulation, that the marriage should not take place till Vera was twenty-one. "English girls are

children till then, and she is specially childish," the mother urged, and rather to her surprise, the Count himself acceded with less difficulty than her husband. In truth he was in no hurry to marry and settle down. He liked bachelorhood, and had amusements of his own which fully satisfied him for the time being. What he desired was the pleasure of knowing that a soft, fair, innocent creature was growing up for him till the hour when he should tire of his present life and claim her; and for this he was not only ready to do without "dot," but to release M. St. Laurent from the heavy debts which he had already incurred towards the de Mailly estate, and make him fresh loans for the improvement of his own. Further, he suggested a stipulation which coincided so exactly with Madame's wishes that she could almost have embraced him for it. Vera was not to know of his proposals till the day when he was permitted to renew them; and in the meantime she was to continue to live in the country with her parents, and not be introduced to society and the admiration of other men.

The bargain was made and concluded; but during the last year Madame St. Laurent had begun to feel it a hard one. It seemed to her that the Count was not only master of the situation, but of her husband and her child. Everything had to be referred to him in a way mortifying to any woman. Even the improvement in her accomplishments which led to Leah's visit was his suggestion; and of late, as he grew older and Vera more womanly, he had manifested such an evident desire to curtail the time of his probation that Madame, dreading to lose her one treasure a day before it was necessary, jumped even at the excuse afforded by her husband's illness for sending the girl out of his sight for a time. But she had never expected such a result from her action, as had actually come to pass. She thought indeed that she had guarded most carefully against even the risk of it; and her dismay at the news contained in Vera's letter was as great, as the wrath and excitement roused in both her husband and the Count by that of Dr. Marstrand.

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